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Personal Reflections: On Encountering a Lion

Robert M. Timm, Editor, The PROBE

It has now been exactly two years since I came face to face with a mountain lion. While this may sound overly dramatic to those of you who deal with large predators on a daily basis in the course of your ADC activities, the circumstance in which I encountered the lion was much different: it was in the driveway of my residence, only a few feet from my garage door.

I had come out of the front door of my house after supper that July evening, and was sitting on the front steps leading to the deck, putting on my boots, when a movement at close range caused me to look up. I was startled to see an adult mountain lion in the driveway, some 30 feet away. We stared at each other, both motionless, for what seemed to be several minutes. I had the distinct impression that I was the more surprised; the lion eventually made a facial expression as if vocalizing, but silently, then turned to slowly walk down the driveway, away from the house. By this time, I was decidedly displeased with its apparent familiarity with its surroundings, and hurried it along its way by hurling a few rocks in its direction. It loped through the open gate in the chain link fence at the bottom of the driveway and disappeared into the thicket of blackberry and poison oak, to the accompaniment of loud scolding by several resident scrub jays.

On first reflection, I was struck by several realizations: First, the lion seemed all too nonchalant about wandering through this corner of our semi-rural residential development—a group of about 75 homes, each on parcels of 1 to 3 acres. It's in an area of rolling hills between Highway 101 and the Russian River, about 5 miles south of the town of Ukiah, the county seat of Mendocino County, California. It seemed quite a bit more difficult to convince the lion to leave my yard than it does to scare away the occasional deer, which make a habit during the dry season of browsing the lower limbs of my apple trees, and of defoliating the rose bushes, even those closest to the house. Second, the lion had apparently come from the direction of the uphill side of the yard, which means it had either jumped the 5-foot chain link fence which surrounds the house, or had walked from the hillside onto the back deck of the house and down the stairway onto the driveway. Its proximity to an occupied residence appeared to cause it no concern. Third, and most disturbing, was the realization that our two daughters, then ages 5

and 3, were no longer going to have the freedom of playing in our yard unsupervised.

We haven't seen a lion in our yard since that time, although it would no longer surprise me to encounter one anywhere in the vicinity. Neighbors report occasionally seeing a lion at a distance—sometimes not far from the outskirts of our development. Reports of sightings of lions at the edges of nearby towns are commonplace, and now seem to be “news” only when the sightings are in or near parks or schoolyards. One result of my “close encounter” is that my wife no longer questions why I have held onto a gun cabinet containing several shotguns and rifles which I seldom use; her immediate questions were whether we had an ample supply of ammunition of the appropriate size, and which key fit the cabinet.

The history of lion management in California—or, more recently, absence of management—is an interesting case study. A moratorium on sport hunting of lions was adopted in the early 1970s; at that time, lion numbers in the state were relatively low, the result of human activities spanning decades of expanding human population in the Golden State. As a UC Davis graduate student working on my doctoral research at the University's Hopland Field Station in the mid-1970s, I regarded the lion skull in the Station's museum collection as a historical relic. At that time, it seemed to be a specimen that was part of the story of human settlement of the North Coast and the Russian River valley. Settlers of European origin first began bringing livestock into the area in the mid-1800s, and they subsequently eliminated the large predators. When, in 1975, a nomadic lion killed several ewes in the Station's research flock, I took slides of the carcasses, which the lion had covered with leaves.

That incidence was an isolated occurrence of lion predation, but was a foretaste of what was to come. When I returned to the Hopland research station as Superintendent in 1987, I found that lion predation had become a chronic problem. Since 1985, lions have killed sheep from the research flock every year, and the losses are significant in number. We don't always find the carcasses; some adult sheep simply are listed as “missing.” Lions tend to drag them into secluded spots, into the brushy hills, to feed on their kills. And during the

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warmer months, scavengers and insects may make it difficult, after a few days, to accurately attribute the cause of death to a specific predator.

What is apparent is that something has changed drastically in the last ten or fifteen years: lions are now present in numbers in our area of north coastal California, and are coming into significant conflict with human activities. State Fish & Game agency records show that 110 lions were killed via depredation permits in Mendocino County between 1972 and 1994—the highest number in any county in the state (second highest was Humboldt County, immediately to the north, with 75 lions taken). In 1994 alone, 23 lions responsible for damage were removed by permit—nearly double the number taken from any other county in the state. On our research station, a 5,300-acre rangeland facility of rugged hills, we commonly see evidence of lion presence throughout the year, and we occasionally encounter lions on the property while we're in the process of our research activities. They simply weren't present before the mid-1980s. The simplest explanation is that lion numbers in California have grown rapidly in recent years, with an accompanying range expansion.

Estimates of the lion population statewide, as developed by Fish & Game, suggest a recent surge in lion numbers and a high rate of increase, but hard population data is nonexistent. At the same time, county budget difficulties have led to an erosion of funding for the cooperative ADC program which serves the public. In a county which once supported as many as 8 ADC trappers, the Board of Supervisors in 1995 failed to appropriate any funds for the program, leaving a few remnant livestock producers to scrape together enough funding to sup-

port a single USDA trapper for a portion of the current fiscal year. Partly, this is a political reality: the sheep industry in California, once prominent and influential in the North Coast, has now moved to the central and southern valleys of the state, where sheep can be grazed on fenced, flat agricultural stubble and pastures—situations which afford more protection from coyotes and other predators. The dominant agricultural interests in our county now are involved in winegrapes and pears, not livestock.

Requests for issuance of depredation permits—which require that lion damage be documented—also show a marked increase throughout the state. Undoubtedly, some lions are also killed by landowners or others outside the permit process. Two human fatalities in 1994 were attributed to mountain lions attacking adults, one in the Sacramento area and one in the San Diego area. In the summer of 1994, a lion attacked a couple who were camped in a remote area of northern Mendocino County, rebuilding a cabin. In the ensuing melee, the lion bit off the man's thumb; the women stabbed it to death with a kitchen knife. The lion subsequently proved to be rabid. The public health and safety aspects of a growing lion population remain foremost on the minds of managers of public lands, particularly parks and recreation areas within California.

University of California Extension Wildlife Specialist Lee Fitzhugh has compiled some of the following data on lion incidents in California: Lions are known to have attacked 10 people in 9 incidents in California between 1985 and 1995. As a

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Your contributions to *The Probe* are welcome. Please send news clippings, new techniques, publications, and meeting notices to *The Probe*, c/o Hopland Research & Extension Center, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449. Articles and notes can also be sent by e-mail to rtimm@ucdavis.edu. If you prefer to FAX material, our FAX number is (707) 744-1040. The deadline for submitting material is the 15th of each month. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of NADCA.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

October 1-5, 1996: 3rd Annual Conference, The Wildlife Society, Cincinnati, Ohio. Conference will include a Symposium, "Social, Economic and Environmental Benefits of Wildlife Damage Management," to be coordinated by Dr. Kathleen Fagerstone (contact at 303-236-2098). For general information on the Conference, contact TWS at (301) 530-2471.

October 5-9, 1996: 50th Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, Arlington Resort and Spa, Hot Springs, Arkansas. Hosted by the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission. For further information, contact AR Game & Fish, #2 Natural Resources Dr., Little Rock, AR 72205.

December 8-11, 1996: 58th Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference, Red Lion Hotel, Omaha, Nebraska. For information, contact 58th Midwest F&W Conference, P.O. Box 4558, Lincoln, NE 68504-0641, phone 402-471-0641, FAX 402-471-5528, or visit <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/iafwa/midwest.html>.

ADC News, Tips, Ideas , Publications . . .

Pigeons Foil French Efforts

The city of Nice, France, sought a way to humanely reduce the city's pigeon numbers, which were responsible for an intolerable amount of droppings on the city's buildings, sidewalks, and roadways. It settled upon a plan to establish "pigeon lofts" stocked with contraceptive-laced feed. The theory was the birds would eat the feed, and the next generation of pigeons would be dramatically smaller. The reality was that the municipal doves were such a hit with local pigeons that they turned into love nests: the town's pigeon population has soared, increasing 20-30%. Apparently, pigeon lovers who fed the birds themselves foiled the town's efforts.

Sea Lions Gorge on Depleted Northwest Salmon

The media have given exhaustive coverage to the plight of gluttonous sea lions in Puget Sound, Washington this spring. Despite the fact that sea lions have decimated the steelhead salmon run in the Northwest, game and fish managers have few options. All sea lions are protected under federal law, even though they are neither threatened nor endangered.

For the past several years, protected sea lions have learned to situate themselves near the mouths of several northwestern rivers during salmon runs. There, they gorge themselves with salmon, often killing many more than they can eat. Fisheries managers have attempted several politically-correct methods of sea lion dispersal, including water cannons, rubber bullets, air horns, and firecrackers.

In March, the story of two particular sea lions caught the media's attention. When the Washington State Dept. of Fish & Wildlife finally received federal approval to kill the two notorious salmon-eaters, animal rights groups cried foul. The Seattle-based Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) called for the governor to intervene and have announced they will file suit to protect all sea lions.

In the meantime, one of nature's most phenomenal occurrences, the salmon run and spawn, continues to have a precarious future.

Coyote Attacks, Wounds Young Boy

A coyote was responsible for a July 13 attack on a 3-year-old boy hiking with his family at Wind Hill Park near Portola Valley, California—a San Mateo county town southwest of Palo Alto. The boy's injuries required medical treatment, and rabies vaccinations were begun as a precautionary measure. Park authorities captured a coyote, which had little fear of humans, near the site of the attack, but they were not sure if it was the animal responsible. Meanwhile, park hiking trails remained temporarily closed.

Your Opinion, Please

One of the issues discussed at a futuring session of The Wildlife Society's Wildlife Damage Management Working Group was the number of damage management-related professional meetings that are currently held. Recently initiated annual gatherings include the Denver (National) Wildlife Research Center's Symposium, the Working Group's sponsorship of a Symposium at The Wildlife Society's Conference, and several nuisance wildlife control operator shortcourses. The question raised was, "Have we reached (or exceeded) the saturation point?"

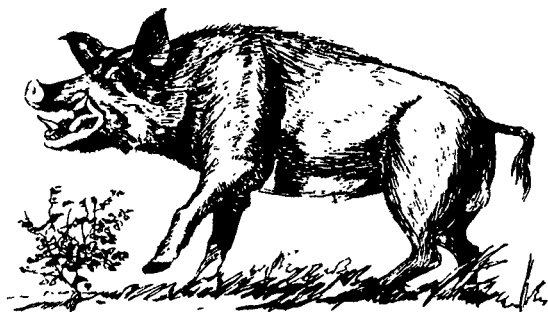
Two regional meetings with similar goals and timing are the Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference and the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop. These meetings are both held every odd-numbered year, the off-year from the Vertebrate Pest Conference held in California. Would combining the Eastern and Great Plains meetings enhance or limit your access to timely information?

Advantages might include a higher quality, more rounded program, proceedings, and trade show due to a potentially larger pool of authors and exhibitors. Resources (time, money, etc.) would be conserved by eliminating one planning committee and the associated proceedings. Disadvantages would include potentially higher travel costs for participants, since, on the average, meetings would be more distant.

I would like to determine the NADCA membership's views on this topic, so please provide input to me directly. I will summarize the responses for a future edition of *The Probe*.



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The editor of **The PROBE** thanks contributors to this issue: Stephen Vantassel, J. Grant Huggins, Richard B. Pierce, and Bob Turner. Send your contributions to **The PROBE**, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449.

Book Review

Stephen Vantassel, Special Coorrespondent, The PROBE

Book Review: Mole Traps: A Collector's Manual, by Rex E. Marsh, Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology, University of California, Davis. Ron Munro, Principal Illustrator. 1995. 169 pp.

Rex Marsh has created an enjoyable reference for the arcane world of mole trap collectors. This spiral-bound, 8-1/2 x 11-inch book catalogs the various inventions humans have created to trap moles. He has done a fine job, providing detailed information regarding patents, type, and where the trap was originally advertised. Mr. Munro's artistry is excellent. His line drawings make one able to understand the mechanics of these traps even though you may have never handled one.

One interesting piece of history about the mole is that they were once trapped for fur. Perhaps the fur industry could resurrect this lost resource, now that we ADC trappers are catching moles in numbers again.

Although this book is not written to discuss the methodology of controlling moles, I did find the book helpful in my own mole trapping. Studying the various trap designs one gains new insights into different ways to catch the pesky mole. Is it necessary to read this book to be proficient at trapping moles? No. Suffice it to say that the scissors and harpoon traps manufactured by Woodstream™ have survived the test of time. But if you love the mole and would like to learn more about

collecting a little piece of trap history, then this book is one for your library.

One final note: this text does not place values on traps like a coin collector's book. Rather, its purpose is simply to catalog the various mole traps that have been made (that we know about) to help the collector know what to look for and identify what he/she might be looking at. Since this text is not about animal damage control, I have not given it an animal damage control rating.

You can obtain a copy by sending \$15 plus \$3 shipping and handling to: Rex E. Marsh, 549 Reed Drive, Davis, CA 95616. Mr. Marsh tells me that readers should be aware that there are only a limited number of copies still available. So I would add, if you're looking for this type of reference work, send your money in quickly.

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Playing with the Numbers

Once a year NADCA members get a directory of current membership. Have you ever wondered about the distribution of this membership? It is a simple matter to break out the percent of members within each of our NADCA Regions as follows:

Region 1 — 12.0%
(AK, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA)

Region 2 — 8.4%
(AZ, CO, NM, UT)

Region 3 — 2.8%
(ID, MT, WY)

Region 4 — 7.3%
(AR, LA, OK, TX)

Region 5 — 8.0%
(IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)

Region 6 — 18.3%
(IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)

Region 7 — 25.0%
(CT, PA, RI, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, VT)

Region 8 — 9.7%
(DC, DE, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV)

Region 9 — 6.2%
(AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, TN)

Region 0 — 2.2%
(Foreign)

There are obvious explanations for some of this disparity; one is the abundance of Nuisance Animal Control Operators in the East, another is the relationship to human population densities. (On second thought, those two items are also related.) I will leave it up to you to speculate as to the other reasons.

Wes Jones

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Personal Reflections: On Encountering a Lion

result of lion-human encounters in 1994, 10 lions were taken simply to protect human safety. In the previous 96 years, only 3 persons were attacked in 2 incidents in California. A similar increase in attacks (and presumably, in lion numbers) has occurred throughout the western U.S. and Canada, along with a large increase in reports of close encounters between humans and lions. This has been the case even in states which have maintained sport hunting seasons on lions.

At the 5th Mountain Lion Workshop held in San Diego in March, Darryl Hebert and Dan Lay reported on incidents occurring on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, which has by far the highest rate of lion attacks on humans in North America. It also is an area where a significant portion of the lion population is harvested through sport hunting. During California's spring election campaign, some scientists and anti-hunting advocates cited Vancouver Island statistics as evidence that sport hunting does not deter attacks. However, Hebert and Lay's evidence shows exactly the opposite. Nearly all the mountain lion attacks (98%) occurred on the western side of the island, sparsely populated by humans. Lions coexist with people on the more densely populated east side of the island, but they are also hunted there. "The Canadians found that the mountain lions on the east side of the island, even in areas where they are treed only for scientific purposes, seem to learn to identify people as predator rather than prey," according to Fitzhugh. Lions on the west side of the island were seen to move into towns more readily than on the east side, where they are hunted. In contrast, lions on the east side changed their territories and moved on after being treed by hounds several time. According to Fitzhugh, "The lessons from Vancouver Island seem to be that where people and lions live together, there are fewer attacks when lions are hunted than when they are not."

Proposition 197, a measure on the March California ballot which would have reversed some aspects of 1990's Proposition 117 and returned some measure of lion management authority to Fish & Game, was defeated. Opponents succeeded, by means of ample funding and some graphic television advertising, of portraying the Prop. 197 solely as a sport hunting issue. Meanwhile, ADC specialists in the state now take as many or more mountain lions annually than were ever taken historically by sport hunting. And when I'm working in my yard, I continue to look over my shoulder now and then.

Letters, Letters, Letters

Editor's Note: The following letter was received by Wes Jones, as a result of NADCA's recent contribution to the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America. NADCA members who wish to make individual contributions to WLFA can send them to: 801 Kingsmill Parkway, Columbus, OH 43229-1137.

Dear Mr. Jones:

We have received your special contribution to help stop anti-hunting drives in seven states. Your generous and timely aid will provide vital help to sportsmen to bolster public support for hunting and wildlife management.

As a member of WLFA, you will continue to receive future quarterly publications and when appropriate, special additional information to keep you apprised of contemporary issues and problems.

Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Richard B. Pierce, President

The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America

Editor's Note: The following letter was received by Wes Jones as a result of his communication with Texas State Representative Robert Turner, who represents District 73 in the Texas House of Representatives. Mr. Turner can be reached at P.O. Box 2910, Austin, TX 78768-2910.

Dear Wes:

As one of the few agricultural producers and sheep herders in the Texas Legislature, I do meet some "different" folks, and have some rather "different" experiences.

Predator control, and the ability of being able to continue to protect our livestock investments, combined with Initiative and Referendum, in which rural residents and agricultural operators have little or no say, is going to be our major challenge of the future. As a sheep herder, this concerns me greatly. Predator losses are almost unbearable now.

Thanks for doing what you are doing. Keep up the good work. Education of our urban brothers is going to be the secret to survival.

Sincerely,

Bob Turner

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Membership Application

NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Mail to: Wes Jones, Treasurer, W8773 Pond View Drive, Shell Lake, WI 54871, Phone: (715) 468-2038

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